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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: SMALL ROMA POPULATION STILL FACES
CHALLENGES

REF: LJUBLJANA 55

Summary

1. (U) The Roma community in Slovenia, numbering between 7,000 and 10,000, is characterized under Slovene law as a "special community," rather than a national minority. Since 1994, the government has passed legislation and worked through various ministries to foster better social integration for Roma through education, cultural outreach, social welfare services, and employment programs. Government efforts also include legalization of Roma settlements and integration of Roma representatives into municipal governments. Even with these government efforts, however, the Roma communities in Slovenia face significant challenges, with unemployment at a sky-high 98 percent. End Summary.

Roma in Slovenia

2. (U) The Government's Office of National Minorities lists the Roma population in Slovenia at around 7,000-10,000, which represents 0.5 percent of the country's population. The Roma have lived in Slovenia since the 15th century, immigrating primarily from Hungary, Croatia and Austria. Today, the primary Roma settlements are located in Prekmurje (northeast), Dolenjska (southeast), Bela Krajina (south), and Posanje (southwest). Each Roma community within Slovenia has distinct linguistic and cultural traditions and there is no unity among the communities. While most Roma hold Slovenian citizenship, some Roma were affected by the 1992 "erasure" of permanent residencies and are still seeking resolution (reftel).

3. (U) The Roma, realizing the need to work with the Slovene government, have created 23 Roma societies within 19 municipalities in Slovenia. The Roma Union of Slovenia, which is the umbrella organization for these societies, focuses on communication between the Roma societies and the Slovene government. The Roma community appoint representatives to these societies, which deal with culture and cooperation and how Roma interests are represented at municipal administration levels and councils.

Current Constitutional and Legal Status

4. (U) The Slovene government has moved toward greater integration and cooperation with the Roma, with the enforcement of Article 65 of the 1992 Constitution. Eleven legislative acts implement Article 65, which stipulates "the statutes and special rights of the Roma community living in Slovenia shall be regulated by law." The Promotion of Measures for Assisting the Roma, adopted in 1995, is the most influential legislation supporting and regulating Roma community issues. It focuses on regional developmental programs specifically for the Roma. The Promotion of Balanced Regional Development Act, established in 2005, set up special programs for regional development in Roma

communities and introduced radio and television programs to be broadcasted in Roma language.

¶15. (U) Other legislation requires that 20 municipalities include a Roma representative in the municipal councils. While this is generally respected, one community has failed to comply for several years. The government is currently considering legislation that would bypass this community's resistance and directly place a Roma representative on the council.

Employment Situation Critical

¶16. (U) According to the Office for National Minorities for the Government of Slovenia, approximately 98 percent of Roma are unemployed. They receive social assistance from the state based on a set of conditions that include actively seeking employment and allowing children to attend school. The government tightened these conditions in 2006 to provide greater incentive for Roma to look for work.

Housing Projects Supported by State

¶17. (U) There is an ongoing effort around the country to address the issue of housing for the Roma; specifically targeting the legalization of Roma settlements and improvements of settlement infrastructure. Amnesty International estimates 110 Roma settlements in 25 Slovene municipalities are currently illegal. Legislation currently under discussion could potentially legalize about 80 of these settlements. The largest Roma community is in Pusca in southwest Slovenia, in which 39 percent live in brick houses, 12 percent in apartment blocks, and the rest in temporary residences. In 2002, the Ministry of Economy offered the

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nine municipalities where most Roma live EUR 628,580 to improve basic infrastructure for Roma settlements. In 2004 the Public Fund for Slovenia for Regional Development and Preservation of the Settlement of Slovenian Rural Areas provided EUR 418,650 by public tender for special projects to support public utility infrastructure for Roma communities. As a result of this tender, 20 municipalities registered 31 special programs for Roma settlements and four received funding.

Focus on Early Education For Greater Roma Inclusion in Slovene Society

¶18. (U) The government and NGOs have long focused on education as a key to Roma integration. Recent government efforts have included developing a common Roma lexicon and curriculum for use in the various schools that Roma children attend. A May 2009 conference involving representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Roma Union, and NGOs focused on preschool education. Following the conference, the government and Roma Union jointly announced the Successful Integration of Roma Children into Education project, which works to integrate Roma children into preschool institutions in order to prepare them for entrance into Slovene elementary schools. The project aims to foster active parental involvement in the education process and provide supplementary training for Roma teachers. The government allotted the Roma Union EUR 2 million for the project, which included 39 elementary schools and 20 preschool institutions.

Comment

¶19. (SBU) The Slovene government has made great strides in incorporating the Roma into Slovene society and is currently focusing on preschool education. However, more work and cooperation between the Slovene population and Roma is necessary. Through ongoing grants and exchange programs, the Embassy continues to support civil society programs addressing the Roma.

SHELTON